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AUTHOR Holley, Freda M.
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ABSTRACT

The author believes her ideas on evaluation reporting are old ideas in various fields including communication theory, advertising, social science, and learning theory. The human factor in reporting evaluation must be considered. Those being evaluated often feel threatened by the evaluation. Evaluators need to accept the behaviors of evaluation subjects. They must be patient, persistent, and persuasive. Evaluators must deal in terms of group or social behaviors, as well as individual behaviors. The evaluator should be an impartial observer who considers the program and research context. Guidelines for the evaluation report include form, brevity, technical language, and type of presentation. The evaluator should realize that utilization of the report will require time. He may need to regularly recapitulate, repeat, and reinterpret his report. The paper contains quotations from Bartlett's Familiar Quotations as old masters' contemporary applications to evaluation reporting. (DWH)

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FOUNDATIONS OF REPORTING:
OR
BARTLETT'S GUIDE TO EVALUATION COMMUNICATION

Freda M. Holley

Austin Independent School District

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Foundations of Reporting:
Or
Bartlett's Guide to Evaluation Communication

Freda M. Holley
Austin Independent School District

As I found myself trying to write this paper, I realized I had arrived at a most unenviable spot. I have mostly told the world what I know about evaluation reporting (Lee and Holley 1978, Holley 1979, Holley, Haskin, Matter, Gilchrist, Baenen, et al. 1979, and Holley 1981). Chewing on this dilemma, I considered my options and remembered the writer's traditional trick. When the well is dry and all else fails, find some new way to say what has previously been recorded. As I considered this for awhile, it suddenly occurred to me that the things I have said about evaluation reporting are not really new. They are old ideas in various fields—communication theory, advertising, social science, and learning theory. Then, it came to me that my first encounter with most of the ideas that had proven so useful to me in evaluation communication were actually even older. Now, why was that? Why, of course, it was only because that first encounter had been in my early days of literary analysis. From that thought I went on to do some research. Now I give you—from just the first hundred pages or so of Bartlett's Quotations—some contemporary application of the old masters to evaluation reporting. They seem to me to be the very foundations of reporting that I felt the need to express. Of course, it also lays the groundwork for my next

paper which may be "Renaissance Foundations for Evaluation Reporting" or some such title.

Human Factors in Reporting

In reporting evaluation information, we must understand the nature of man and the very human concerns of those whose work we are involved in evaluating. Otherwise, we are unable to understand our audience, the first essential.

Evaluators are often surprised that those being evaluated cannot stand dispassionately back and view the objective evidence on their efforts. Anyone who is involved in a project with evaluation, however, has surely put his heart and his energy into that enterprise and insofar as evaluation threatens that investment, the reaction of the participant is natural human behavior.

When neither their property nor their honor is touched, the majority of men live content.
Machiavelli

Evaluators also tend to be surprised that when the report is ready, scheduling a hearing is not always easy. The objects of evaluation are all too aware that the chance of bad news is somewhat higher in most instances than the probability of good news. Postponement is the anticipated response.

I would far rather be ignorant than knowledgeable of evils.
Aeschylus

From the notion that the audience is unwilling also flows the idea that negative evaluation is not likely to convince the subjects.

Bodily exercise, when compulsory, does no harm to the body; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind.

Plato

All great changes are irksome to the human mind, especially those which are attended with great dangers and uncertain effects.

John Adams

Inevitably, what we are asking of our evaluatees is that they make changes in their behavior, but in this we ask the greatest of all commitments.

The response to our request is a tried and true strategy - delay! Perhaps the next report will change the charge.

By delaying he preserved the state.

Quintus Ennius

I am sometimes asked if persuasion is an ethical methodology for evaluation communicators. There are a string of truths about human nature that tell me that the evaluator who does not use persuasion is probably one who fails to communicate at all.

Nothing is so firmly believed as what we least know.

Montaigne

Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.

Demosthenes

There are many times in reporting that what we report runs counter to appearances. The child in the experimental drama program who appears to be interested and learning turns out to make no gain in language skills. The teacher finds it difficult to accept our test scores because they fly in the face of his observations.

Men trust their ears less
than their eyes.
Herodotus

How does the evaluator respond to these natural human behaviors? It is important, first, to accept these behaviors and to be willing to deal with individuals in their infinite varieties, to invest in persuasion, to persist, and to be patient. We must also try to build into our evaluations not only judgments on what is, but good options for what can be.

According as the man is,
so must you humor him.
Terence

How dreadful knowledge of
the truth can be
When there's no help in
truth!
Sophocles

Political and Social Factors

Man is by nature a political animal.
Aristotle

The evaluator must deal not only with individuals in terms of human behaviors, but also in terms of group or social behaviors.

Sometimes the best person to get action on evaluation findings is not the "general," but rather some other key person. The good evaluation communicator figures out who will be the best recipient to stimulate action as well as the proper person in terms of the organization chart.

(Of his son)
The boy is the most powerful of all the Hellenes; for the Hellenes are commanded by the Athenians, the Athenians by myself, myself by the boy's mother, and the mother by her boy.

Themistocles

The difference is slight, to the influence of an author, whether he is read by five hundred readers, or by five hundred thousand; if he can select the five hundred, he reaches the five hundred thousand.

Henry Brooks Adams

Moreover, the number of people who receive a report may not be nearly so important as that those who matter receive it.

The Evaluator

The lot of the evaluator is not a good one.

Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.

Sophocles

The evaluator may report good news year after year and build up a contingent of friends, but the number will fade rapidly with but <u>one</u> bad message.

Every advantage in the past is judged in the light of the final issue.

Demosthenes

The evaluator must also be careful about undue friendliness with staff since their reaction to negative findings will be a sense of betrayal.

How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!
Sophocles

In short the evaluator must be a kind of historian who is an exemplar of humanity.

The first law for the historian is that he shall never dare utter an untruth. The second is that he shall suppress nothing that is true. Moreover, there shall be no suspicion of partiality in his writing, or of malice.
Cicero

Context of the Evaluation

The evaluator must be ever mindful that he heed the context of a program for it makes all the difference in how a result is interpreted.

It is circumstance and proper timing that give an action its character and make it either good or bad.
Agesilaus

The research context must also be considered. We must interpret the isolated finding in terms of our own previous work and that of others nationally.

One swallow does not make a summer.
Aristotle

The Report Itself

The literature is particularly full of guidelines in reporting, perhaps because it has always been a function of the writer to tell the society about itself. Writers early began to distill reporting guidelines.

Form is the first consideration. And of that form the most important is the beginning.

A whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end.
Aristotle

The beginning is the most important part of the whole.
Plato

The second guideline is to keep it brief...

It is quality rather than quantity that matters.
Seneca

It is this simplicity that makes the uneducated more effective than the educated when addressing popular audiences.
Aristotle

...and simple.

Yet we must keep in mind that there must be enough jargon that we are recognized for our skills.

High thoughts must have high language.
Aristophanes

The same type of evaluation presentation cannot be used repeatedly. In particular, final reports to Boards must be varied infinitely to get and hold their interests.

It is not possible to step twice in the same river.
Heraclitus

One picture is worth more
than ten thousand words.
Chinese proverb

Illustrations as always are recognized as valuable.

We are rightfully cautioned about putting in too many ifs, ands, and buts. To do so, assures that our audience will be lost.

And while I at length debate
and beat the bush,
There shall step in other men
and catch the birds.
John Heywood

Evaluation Impact

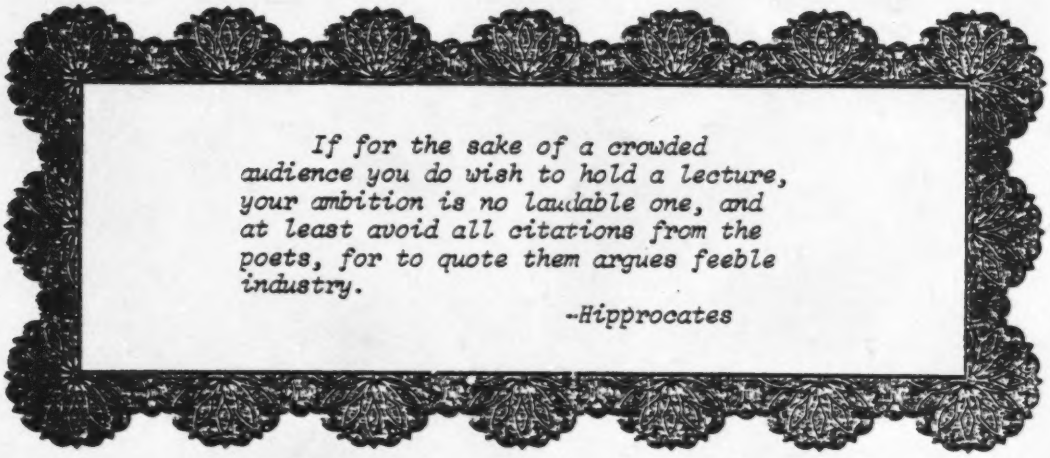
Antiphores said merrily
that in a certain city the
cold was so intense that
words were congealed as
soon as spoken, but that
after some time they thawed
and became audible; so that
the words spoken in winter
were articulated next summer.
Plutarch

A most important lesson for the evaluator is that he must not expect utilization to follow quickly upon the evaluation report. A gestation period seems to be required. I know communication has succeeded when some one tells me conclusively "Yes, research says...(whatever my report suggested)."

However, the evaluator must also remember that an institutional memory of the report cannot be depended upon. People come and people go; therefore, he must be willing to regularly recapitulate, repeat, and reinterpret.

Time is a sort of river of
passing events, and strong
is its current; no sooner
is a thing brought to sight
than it is swept by and another
takes its place, and this too
will be swept away.
Marcus Aurelius

Thus we see how little is new and how much is old. Even upon this, my speech, the ancients have the final evaluation word.


If for the sake of a crowded
audience you do wish to hold a lecture,
your ambition is no laudable one, and
at least avoid all citations from the
poets, for to quote them argues feeble
industry.
-Hipprocates

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